

*Island of the Blue Dolphins*, Chapter 15  
**Hunters Versus Pets**

**Grade Level**

Upper Elementary: Third Grade through Fifth Grade

**Subject**

Literacy and Language Arts, Science

**Common Core Standards**

W.3.1

**Next Generation Science Standards**

3-LS2-1

**Background Information**

In our society, most students either have a pet dog or know someone who does. On Karana's island, however, being a pet is not the normal lifestyle for dogs. The wild dogs of Karana's island roam in a pack and fend for themselves; they have no caretakers. For a dog, what are the benefits and challenges of being a wild dog versus a domesticated pet?

This activity helps students learn about animal groups. The students will first focus on the pros and cons of being either a wild dog or domestic pet and then engage in debate on the subject before writing their personal opinions on the question of which offers a better life.

**Materials**

- Copy of activity sheet for each student (provided)
- Class set of *Island of the Blue Dolphins*

**Procedure**

1. Give each student a copy of the activity sheet.
2. Group students into either Hunters or Pets and explain the directions for the activity. Keep in mind that you might need to allow students to conduct online or library research if they need more information than the book and their personal experiences provide. Here are some resources for research on dogs and wolves: <https://kids.nationalgeographic.com/explore/moment-of-galleries/moment-of-woof-2/#MOWoof-dachshund.png> and <https://kids.nationalgeographic.com/animals/gray-wolf/#gray-wolf-closeup.jpg>
3. Give students time to complete the activity sheet; monitor their work.
4. Bring the class together for a debate.
5. Help students address the issue of pack behavior and how humans can take the place of a group. Questions for students on either side of the debate to consider:
  - a. How do the dogs obtain their food?
  - b. What types of shelter are available?

- c. What opportunities do the dogs have to communicate with others?
  - d. What opportunities do the dogs have to mate and care for their young?
  - e. How might the dogs fare in sickness and as they age?
6. Once several benefits and challenges have been discussed on each side, have students explain their own opinions in writing, using evidence drawn from the class conversation and the student activity sheet.

### **Enrichment Activities**

The dogs that lived on San Nicolas Island with the Nicoleños (that is, the real-life counterparts to Karana and other characters in *Island of the Blue Dolphins*) may have been neither wild animals nor pets but instead domesticated work animals that helped to pull sleds across the island and hunt marine animals for food. Students are probably more familiar with horses or cattle serving as domesticated work animals, but dogs can be trained to help humans work, too. If you add domesticated work dogs to the classroom debate, how does the conversation change, if at all?



